

California State Board of Education  
California Department of Education - Instructional Quality Commission  
1430 N Street, Suite #5111  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Social Sciences and Religion Faculty Group Comments on the History-Social Science Framework Narrative Revision.**

To the Honorable Board Members and Commissioners:

We submit this letter to express concerns regarding certain edits to the 6th and 7th grade History-Social Science Framework. The California Department of Education's Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) History Social Science Subject Matter Committee (HSS-SMC), with the intention to be balanced, has ill-advisedly accepted edits that do not serve that goal. Those edits also do not "instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage" or "enable all students to become aware and accepting of religious diversity while being allowed to remain secure in any religious beliefs they may already have," as required by the Standards for Evaluating Instruction Materials for Social Content (2013), pages 5 and 10, and by California law.

We acknowledge that acceptance of edits is the IQC's prerogative within the mandated guidelines. However, we respectfully express our concern that the HSS-SMC accepted certain edits proffered by a group of scholars, calling themselves "South Asia Faculty Group" (SAFG), who claimed to represent the corpus of scholarship on India and Hinduism. In particular, we are concerned that the commission may have been unduly influenced by the SAFG's last-minute submission of suggested edits because SAFG represented themselves as the *only* authoritative experts participating in the discussion, which is not the case. The SAFG also represented their views as being based on scholarly consensus, when in fact their views are contested by other academics.

We should all be working for a representation of India and Hinduism that is consistent with the manner in which other cultures and religions are portrayed, and one which avoids Eurocentric biases. (The Board of Education instructed the IQC to eliminate the Framework's Eurocentric focus.) Based on a comparative analysis of how other cultures and religions are presented, we therefore urge the IQC and Board to adopt the recommendations below, which are endorsed by the academics and other signatories here, in order to achieve a more equitable treatment of India and Hinduism in the History-Social Science Framework than previously accepted.

We respectfully urge you to *reject* the following IQC HSS-SMC recommended edits (which the South Asian Faculty Group originally suggested) for the reasons stated below, and to *accept* our recommended edits.

**1. The religion of India/Hinduism:**

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2439** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 210, line 777): "How did religions of Ancient India, including, but not limited to early Hinduism, support individuals, rulers, and societies?"

**WE RECOMMEND for 2439:** Restore the original text from November 2015 Framework draft for Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 210, line 77) i.e.: “How did the religion of Hinduism support individuals, rulers, and societies?”

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2480** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (pages 212-13, lines 836-837): “Teachers focus students on the question: How did religions of Ancient India, including, but not limited to early Hinduism, support individuals, rulers, and societies?”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2480:** Replace Chapter 10, Grade 6 (pages 212-13, lines 836-837) with “Teachers focus students on the question: How did Hinduism support individuals, rulers, and societies?”

**Rationale:** This Framework narrative follows a specific pattern for analysis of each society and religion, i.e, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc. Changing “Hinduism” to “religions of Ancient India” in many places results in confusion, since other religions are already addressed in their respective sections. We recommend that this pattern not be altered when Hinduism is addressed, but the original language be maintained for consistency throughout the Framework narratives.

Specifically, for each major religion in 6th grade, the question is asked: “How did the religion of \_\_\_\_\_ support individuals, rulers and societies?” Following that pattern, on page 210, line 777, the India section’s opening bullet-point summary includes, “How did the religion of Hinduism support individuals, rulers and societies?” The next line, 778, says, “How did the religion of Buddhism support individuals, rulers and societies?”

Both questions occur again, the first on page 212-13, lines 836-837 and the second on 216, lines 909-910. What seems to have happened here is that the IQC HSS-SMC recommended edit, influenced by the SAFG, did not take into account the whole context of the Framework narrative. Consequently, they addressed the question “How did the religion of Hinduism support individuals, rulers and societies?” as it occurred on page 216, and in the process seemingly assumed the Framework narrative was leaving out both Buddhism and Jainism from the religions of the time. However, that was a mistaken conclusion given that there was already a separate question for Buddhism. That led to the recommended edit employing legalistic language, “...religions of Ancient India, including but not limited to early Hinduism.”

The only religion omitted in the original is Jainism. If the intent is to be inclusive of Jainism, it would be better, and less confusing, if it were added on page 216, lines 921 by asking, “How did the religion of Jainism support individuals, rulers and societies?” as well as in the section’s opening bullet-point list.

Further, if anyone were to argue that Hinduism did not exist then as what we today refer to as “Hinduism,” that would be an unfounded erasure of history on the grounds of semantics: what we “call” it. We recommend that the Board not obscure the fact that the relevant historical time period for the Framework narrative evidenced practices that were established then and are now common, and philosophies that were prominent then as now, as well as Deities that were worshipped then as now, which we refer to as “Hinduism.” We recommend not creating confusion on this matter, merely because the name “Hinduism” might have been adopted later. Moreover, if there is to be a discussion of the term “Hinduism,” which is in the Content

Standards, it should be as part of an overall review of the Content Standards, and not during the Framework narrative revision, which is specifically mandated to adhere to the existing Content Standards.

## 2. Non-historical references to the geographical area of the Indian subcontinent:

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2436** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 210, line 774): “The Early Civilizations of India (South Asia)”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2436:** Restore the original text from November 2015 Framework draft for Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 210, line 774) i.e.: “The Early Civilizations of India”

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2441**- Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 210, line 783): “In this unit students learn about ancient societies in India (South Asia).”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2441:** Restore the original text from November 2015 Framework draft for Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 210, line 783): i.e. : “In this unit students learn about ancient societies in India.”

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2454** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 211, lines 811-812): “A flourishing urban civilization developed in India (South Asia) from as early as 3300 BCE along the Indus River.”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2454:** Restore the original text from November 2015 Framework draft for Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 211, lines 811-812) i.e. “A flourishing urban civilization developed in India from as early as 3300 BCE along the Indus River.”

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2459** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 212, lines 819-821): “Ancient South Asia experienced a Vedic period (ca. 1500-500 BCE), named for the *Vedas* which were composed in Sanskrit...”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2459:** Replace Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page (page 212, lines 819-821) with “Ancient India experienced a Vedic period (ca. 1500-500 BCE), named for the *Vedas* which were composed in Sanskrit...”

**Rationale:** In several places, only four of which are listed above, the IQC HSS-SMC recommended edits replace references to “India” with “South Asia” or “India (South Asia).” We recommend reverting to “India” in all such places for the following reasons.

**First**, the legally mandated Content Standards use “India,” and such a major change needs to be considered when the Content Standards are revised and a proper discussion can be conducted. **Second**, the recommendation to use “South Asia” is not historical. Geographic and political terms based on events that took place since the mid-twentieth century are anachronistic, that is, they belong to a period other than that being portrayed. The term “South Asia” is a post-WWII geopolitical designation to account for the breakup of British India into India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. However, the time period referred to in the Framework narrative predates that period by millennia. **Third**, from ancient times, as noted in historical records, foreigners and Indians alike have perceived of the

entire Indian subcontinent as one geographical unit. **Fourth**, the Framework narrative refers to all other ancient geographical areas by their ancestral terms -- China, Japan, Egypt, Greece, etc. Only "India" is recommended for a change. **Finally**, although the following is not an academic or procedural point, we think it is worth noting that this change has greatly upset the Indian community and is regarded by them as an untoward attempt to erase their cultural heritage.

### 3. The role and authority of brahmins:

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2482** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 213, lines 838-840): "Brahmins, that is, priestly families, assumed authority over complex devotional rituals."

**WE RECOMMEND for 2482:** Revert to this slightly adjusted version of the previously approved edit for Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 213, lines 838-840): "Brahmins, that is, priestly families, assumed authority over complex devotional rituals, but many important sages, such as Valmiki and Vyasa, were not born to brahmin families."

**Rationale:** The additional material, "such as Valmiki and Vyasa, were not born to brahmin families" is provided to clarify that religious leadership and authority in Hinduism was not invested solely in the priest jatis. The intention here is to avoid an inapt comparison of priest jatis with priests in other religions, such as in Catholicism. That comparison is a holdover from nineteenth century Eurocentric biases (sometimes referred to as "Orientalism") in the study of comparative religions. (As noted earlier, the Board of Education instructed the IQC to eliminate the Framework's Eurocentric focus.) It is well-accepted in Hindu scholarship today that from the ancient to modern times, there have been countless saints and sages in the Hindu fold, who have not been born to brahmin families.

Further, in their letter of February 24, the SAFG stated "both were Brahmins," which is contrary to Hindu tradition. Valmiki, author of the *Ramayana*, is dated variously between the 5th and 1st century bce. According to that epic's introduction, Valmiki was a highway robber, not born in a brahmin family, who was reformed after an encounter with the divine sage Narada and went on to be considered one of the revered sages of Hinduism. His earlier life as a robber did not preclude his advancement to being revered as a saintly figure. Similarly, Vyasa, the author of Hinduism's other major epic the *Mahabharata*, was born to a fisherwoman, also regarded as a "low" jati. Again, his birth did not preclude his joining the ranks of Hinduism's greatest sages. Similar is the case with many of the Bhakti saints like Nandanar, Ravidas, Chokamela, and many others.

### 4. References to caste in ancient India:

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2511**- Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 213, lines 872-874): "A person belonged to a particular varna not just by his professional excellence and his good conduct, but mainly by birth."

**WE RECOMMEND for 2511:** Revert to this version (possibly with a slight change) of the previously approved edit for Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 213, lines 872-874): "A person belonged to a particular varna by his professional excellence and his good conduct, not by birth itself," or alternatively and more specifically, "not by family of birth itself."

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2536** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 215, lines 891-892): “Teachers should make clear to students that this was a social and cultural structure as well as a religious belief.”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2536:** Revert to this version, with a slight change, of previously approved edit for Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 215, lines 891-892): “Teachers should make clear to students that this was a social and cultural structure, rather than a foundational religious belief.”

**Rationale:** Varna, the topic of the first edit, 2511, is not based on the family of birth according to the *Rig Veda*. Moreover, the Bhagavad Gita explicitly links varna in terms of the personal characteristics of an individual.

In the time we are speaking of, ancient India, varna referred only to an individual. Over a period of time, the flexible varna system became multiple jatis or endogamous groups. Later in India’s history, later than the time period relevant to the 6th grade Framework narrative, jatis evolved into a less flexible and hereditary social and cultural structure akin to the medieval European feudal system.

The second edit, 2536, is a matter of equity in the discussion of religions in 6th and 7th grade textbooks. The Content Standards for each civilization covered in the 6th and 7th grade specifically state that, “Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious and social structures of the early civilizations of \_\_\_\_.” But this is done quite selectively, with no mention of social structure in the discussion of other religions in the same way as for Hinduism and India. The result has been that the actual textbook chapters that cover Hinduism are almost entirely focused on caste, as if that were the essence of the Hindu religion. It is our intention here to create a more balanced narrative, as compared with other religions.

In that regard, matters of social equity must be considered, especially if Hinduism is not being viewed from the same lens as other world religions covered in the framework narrative. For example, well-worn scholarship has revealed that hierarchical views in Christianity supported the subjugation of native peoples and the practice of slavery, and we still live with the inequality that sprang from that today, even if, later, Christians began to oppose such practices. Certainly, scriptures and saints of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam have addressed negative social issues. But it is quite another matter to say any of them created a religious mandate.

Consequently, we suggest that if the revised Framework narrative is silent on negative social structures involving other religions, it ought to similarly represent Hinduism without such tendencies. Conversely, if the IQC and Board deem it necessary to highlight negative interpretations of social issues and attribute them to Hinduism, then it should do so across all of the socio-historical accounts of the other world religions, as well.

## 5. The role of women:

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2544** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 215, 894-895): “Although ancient India was a patriarchy, women had a right to their personal wealth, especially jewelry, gold, and silver, but little property rights when compared to men, akin to the other ancient kingdoms and societies.”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2544:** Replace Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 215, lines 894-895, Comment 2544) with: “Although most of ancient Indian society was patriarchal, akin to the other ancient kingdoms and societies, women in India had a right to their personal wealth, especially jewelry, gold, and silver, but fewer property rights when compared to men.”

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2545** - Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 215, lines 896-897, Comment 2545): “They participated in religious ceremonies and festival celebrations, though not as equals.”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2545:** Replace Chapter 10, Grade 6 (page 215, lines 896-897, Comment 2545) with: “They participated in religious ceremonies and festival celebrations, often with their husbands, as well as on their own.”

**Rationale:** In edit 2544, the IQC HSS-SMC accepted the SAFG’s claims that ancient India was patriarchal. However, that is both ahistorical and inaccurate, given that parts of what is now northeastern India and southern India, including Kerala, have been matrilineal from ancient times into the modern era.

The second edit, 2545, is even more inaccurate with its “not as equals” change from the original which said, “They participated equally with their husbands in religious ceremonies and festival celebrations.” In Vedic times, women could perform their own rites, or perform them equally with men. For this edit then, we recommend eliminating the judgmental “not as equals” in favor of a more general statement.

Again, as with social structure (discussed above), such negative assessments are not made of the position of women in other faiths. Consequently, for equity in representation of religions throughout 6th and 7th grade textbooks, Hinduism should not be singled out in this manner -- or similar discussions should be included for the other religions.

## 6. References to Hinduism versus the religions of ancient India.

- **IQC HSS-SMC Recommended Edit 2734** - Chapter 11 (Grade 7, page 265, lines 703-704): “Building on their previous study of Hinduism in 6th grade, students study the question: How did the religions of ancient India change over time?”

**WE RECOMMEND for 2734:** Replace Chapter 11 (Grade 7, page 265, lines 703-704) with: “Building on their previous study of Hinduism in 6th grade, students study the question: How did Hinduism change over time?”

**Rationale:** Here again, we have the same problem as we did in item “1” above, that the change does not take into account the overall Framework narrative structure. The question, “How did...” follows a pattern present throughout the 7th grade. Page 233 states, “How did major religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism) and cultural systems (Confucianism, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment) develop and change over time?” On page 240: “How did the religion of Christianity develop and change over time?” On page 252: “How did the religion of Christianity develop and change over time?” On page 254, “How did Islam develop and change over time?” And on page 266, “How did Buddhism spread and change over time?” Inserting “religions of ancient India” in the place of Hinduism, then, creates confusion, since

other “religions of ancient India” are already addressed separately: Buddhism is dealt with separately in the 7th grade on page 266 and Sikhism is addressed on page 233.

### **Conclusion:**

These are just a small number of the overall edits that we find problematic; however, we offer these few to aid the IQC and Board in their deliberations. We respectfully remind the IQC and Board that this is a teaching document for K-12 teachers. Consequently, the document should not create unnecessary obstacles for a more constructive understanding of the Indian subcontinent and the world’s third largest religion, when such obstacles are not adopted when other religions are discussed. In this regard, ironically, the South Asian Faculty Group’s attempt to nuance Indian history caused the opposite effect.

Lastly, diversity of religious perspective is not the sole province of the South Asia Faculty Group. Many of the signatories to this letter are Hindu, but many are not. We are concerned that the academic credentials of a group of scholars in our community were irregularly privileged, at the last minute, in an otherwise fair frameworks process. We welcome robust academic debate about the politics of India. However, we do not think that debate is appropriately addressed in a K-12 textbook Framework narrative in California. We believe that the focus of California K-12 education, as mandated by state law, should be to represent Hinduism in a manner comparable to other religions -- fairly, accurately, and equitably.

Please accept this letter as representative of our collective concerns.

Respectfully submitted,

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